



Town of Groton, Connecticut

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Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., John F. Scott, Paulann H. Sheets, James L. Streeter, and Elissa T. Wright.

Tuesday, September 19, 2006

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

2. **ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Scott, Councilor Sheets, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Wright
Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.

3. **NEW BUSINESS**

2006-0220 FYE 2008 Budget Discussion with RTM

Discussed

See 9/19/06 discussion under #2006-0133 Budget Guidelines for FYE 2008.

2006-0130 Community Human Service Needs

Discussed

See 9/19/06 discussion under #2006-0133 Budget Guidelines for FYE 2008.

2006-0133 Budget Guidelines for FYE 2008

Recommended for Deletion

Town Manager Oefinger suggested deleting 2006-0116 Outside Agency Snow Removal and 2006-0117 Outside Agency Fleet Maintenance since those services were reinstated in the FYE 2007 Budget. Mayor Watson made a referral to Public Safety on the ambulance services using the Town's fleet maintenance services.

Discussion followed on fleet maintenance for outside agencies. The Town Manager stated he would identify how many vehicles outside of the Town are being maintained. He explained that the Town charges direct costs only. At one time, it was possible to maintain outside agency vehicles, but it is becoming increasingly difficult in terms of the number of employees and facilities. The Town Manager noted that there have been no discussions regarding a regional maintenance facility. In addition, he noted that costs are rarely shared equally in regional facilities. If the Town is trying to operate under a zero dollar increase budget, there is no incentive to make a major investment in a regional facility. The consensus of the Committee was to delete 2006-0116 Outside Agency Snow Removal and 2006-0117 Outside Agency Fleet Maintenance.

The Town Manager went on to explain that Town Operations have "hit the wall" in a number of areas and the only real savings left will be in elimination of programs and services. Discussion followed on elimination of services to outside agencies and whether or not those costs would then be passed on to the Town's taxpayers in other ways. The Town Manager suggested that the

Council must have a meaningful discussion with the Board of Education and Subdivisions about cutting costs. The Council must also recognize that elimination of services and programs will always mean an increased cost to someone else.

Discussion followed on performance based budgeting and results based accountability. Mayor Watson noted that it would take a long time to analyze Town programs, i.e. identify the desired effect and then find or generate the necessary statistics.

Discussion followed on providing an employee suggestion box including providing a bonus to employees whose suggestions save the Town money. Councilor Bond suggested empowering the Town Manager to do his job, which is developing a budget without Town Council guidance and identifying significant changes when the budget is presented to the Council for review.

2006-0220 FYE 2008 Budget Discussion with RTM

Councilor Kolnaski noted that the RTM has committee meetings, the Town Council is notified of those meetings, and Councilors can and should attend. Discussion followed on attending RTM committee meetings during the budget process. Councilor Bartinik is open to attending or not. Mayor Watson expressed support for attending meetings to improve communications. Councilors Bond, Wright, Streeter, Scott and Sheets opposed the idea citing separation of the Town Council and RTM and their individual roles in the budget process. The Council asked staff to draft a communication to the RTM for the Council's review, summarizing their comments and inviting the RTM Committees to attend the Town Council budget meetings.

Councilor Scott asked about the possibility of meeting with the Board of Education.

2006-0130 Community Human Service Needs

Discussion followed on the services that Groton provides and how Groton has been impacted by other communities that have shut down their programs. The Town Manager noted that there have been more regional efforts to address human services needs.

Mayor Watson highlighted some of the activities conducted by Human Services.

The Town Manager explained that Human Services plays a "matchmaker role" between people in need and available programs.

Town Manager Oefinger suggested bringing in department heads to identify unmet needs in preparation for the budget. Councilors Bond, Streeter, Watson, and Kolnaski expressed support for the idea and the consensus of the Council was to start with Human Services.

Councilor Bartinik asked for a report on the Juvenile Review Board.

Budget Guidelines for FYE 2008

Councilor Kolnaski stated that the Council should let the Town Manager develop the budget. Councilor Bartinik stated that if the Council meets with departments in advance, the Council will have a better basis to decide where cuts should be made. Mayor Watson noted that the issuance of budget guidelines started during former Town Manager Ron LeBlanc's tenure. Councilor Wright suggested it would be helpful to have a presentation from the Town Manager, with input from the Superintendent of Schools, in advance of budget preparation to put the big picture items for the upcoming budget year into context, to the extent that they are knowable. The Town Manager noted that specifics that early would be limited. Councilor Wright agreed that it is the Town Manager's responsibility to prepare the budget, but it would be helpful to provide guidelines.

Councilor Streeter expressed support for allowing the Town Manager to present his budget to the Town Council and he noted that last year it was irresponsible of the Council to provide guidance at the last minute. Councilor Scott agreed with Councilors Bond and Kolnaski and supported letting the Town Manager do his job with the budget. He noted that the Town Operations portion of the budget represents 30% of budget, but the Town is blamed for 100%. He suggested that an outside consultant examine the Board of Education budget and report to the Town Council. Councilor Sheets agreed with Councilor Bartinik and stated she would like to see the drivers for the Town Manager's budget prior to receiving the budget.

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Scott, to recommend a resolution noting that the Council supports the Town Manager's role of developing the Town's budget, without guidelines from the Town Council.

A motion to amend the motion to clarify "for the FYE 2008 budget only" was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Scott.

Discussion followed and the consensus of the Council was to allow the Town Manager to develop the budget without guidelines from the Council, and both motions and seconds were withdrawn.

By consensus, the Council asked for an overview of the issues affecting the budget by the Town Manager, followed by meetings and individual presentations/discussions with department heads so that they could be in a better position to review and evaluate the Town Manager's budget.

2006-0120

Town Wide Police Study

Discussed

See 9/19/06 discussion under #2006-0133 Budget Guidelines for FYE 2008.

2006-0126

Police Department Staffing

Discussed

See 9/19/06 discussion under #2006-0133 Budget Guidelines for FYE 2008.

2006-0131

Update on Ambulance Service Study Recommendations

Discussed

See 9/19/06 discussion under #2006-0133 Budget Guidelines for FYE 2008.

2006-0116

Outside Agency Snow Removal

Recommended for Deletion

See 9/19/06 discussion under #2006-0133 Budget Guidelines for FYE 2008.

2006-0117

Outside Agency Fleet Maintenance

Recommended for Deletion

See 9/19/06 discussion under #2006-0133 Budget Guidelines for FYE 2008.

2006-0198

Town Manager Annual Evaluation

Not Discussed

4. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.